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*The Faery Queene of Spenser.*

FANCY, though she plays her freaks in the present age, has yet unquestionably lost the spring and vivacity of her youth. She has been so roughly treated by criticks of the last two hundred years, that it is no wonder her warmth is somewhat chilled, and her gamesome mood is subdued into cautious measures. She reminds us of a declining beauty, who is less lavish than formerly of exposing the whole artillery of her charms—dresses with more preciseness, but really with less grace than before—frolicks with the greatest staidness—and appears before the world in the ambiguous character of a demure hoyden, a captivating *antique*. But what? The inspiration of our theme has betrayed us into downright allegory.

Johnson omitted Spenser in his *unaccountable* catalogue of poets; and Aikin has endeavoured, with most lamentable ill-success, to supply the defect. The present attempt will perhaps contribute only a humble offering to the furtherance of the design.

The literature of the age of Queen Elizabeth was the compound result of three united streams, which rose at distances vastly removed from each other. The classicks of antiquity—the romances of the middle age—and the translations of the Jewish scriptures—these are the ingredients whose incongruous and unassimulating mixture we behold in almost every

portion of the mass. Until within a few years, a complete ferment and incorporation had not taken place ; so that almost the whole body of English poetry presents us with the discordant machinery of heathen mythology and Christian divinity—and a vain attempt at the reconciliation of feudal maxims with Christian sentiments. Genius has at length informed itself, that it is much better to adopt the *spirit* than the names and deities of antiquity ; and, divesting chivalry of its more barbarous and repulsive traits, it has made use of its remaining excellencies, in order to recommend the less dazzling lustre of modern sentiments, imagery and manners. For though Scott and his followers lay their scenes in chivalrous periods, yet they can take only the skeletons of their performances from the books which treat of those periods. The life-blood and motion of the whole must be drawn from their own breasts and their own immediate experience. Ellen is a modern Scotchwoman in every thing but her shallop ; and Marmion is a marshal of Bonaparte, with a helmet and a page. *Loveliness* and *bravery* are the produce of all ages ; they are all we principally care about in reading Scott ; and whether the latter appears in a coat of mail or a suit of regimentals, or whether the former shines beneath a hood or a straw-bonnet, makes not the difference of a jot in the pulsations and heavenly agitations which a true poetical description of them excites.

But notwithstanding the ill-assorted materials which compose the literature of the above-mentioned era, it must not be supposed that the consequences of their union were uniformly baneful. On the contrary, there was more gained from the mixture, however heterogeneous, than could have been derived from either ingredient in a separate state. It is true, taste was sometimes embarrassed ; but on the whole, the higher flights of genius, the play of the loftier passions, and the expression of more godlike sentiments were the richer fruits of that triple alliance. Heathen antiquity could furnish magnificence ; romance lent its enchantment, and the Bible taught the way to the heart. The first was the storehouse of reason ; the second of fancy ; but the last could alone impart that tender melancholy, that mysterious morality, which constitute the atmosphere of the most delightful regions of English poetry.

The *plan* of the ‘*Faery Queene*’ is the grandest and most

noble that ever entered into the constitution of a poem. It is a personification of all the virtues and vices, all the passions and affections—yes—down to the appetites, and the little propensities, and even the negative qualities, which belong to the character of man. It is a universal looking-glass; the man does not live, who will not recognize somewhere in this wonderful mirror the features of his own heart. Disdaining, like the common herd of epick poets, to make the events of history the *stamina* of his work, the author has built his castle *entirely* in the air, and has sought his materials and resources only in the repositories of abstraction. It is true, Elizabeth, and Arthur, and England are introduced; but they are perfect underpieces, which, if circumstances demanded might be removed, and the names of any other monarchs and any other country be substituted with all imaginable ease. Can the same be said of the heroes of the *Iliad*, the *Eneid*, or the *Paradise Lost*? This is not urged as a merit, but only as a distinctive characteristick of the work. But *cannot* it be urged as a merit? Homer takes a hero, by whose example, whether good or bad, and its consequences, he intends to convey instruction. But Spenser seizes hold of a quality; christens it with a name; (though by the way too often shockingly pedantick;) arms it cap-a-pie; and sends it forth into all the untried varieties of life. This quality we cannot help accompanying personally through its adventures; the hero, we only look after. If we sometimes sympathise with the hero, with the quality we do more; we identify it with something within our own bosoms.

We lament that there is gone abroad a deplorable aversion to allegory. When we put the question to our literary friends, ‘Have you read Spenser?’—the negative reply, which generally succeeds, is not so much explained by the length of the poem,—or the obsolescence of the diction,—or the antique simplicity of the style, as by the laconick confession, ‘I don’t like allegory.’

The secret of this antipathy, (to be at once both a little positive and severe,) lies in the mental effort which is required to develop it. And in order both to prove and to illustrate this, we shall go some way round, though we nevertheless believe we shall come to the point.

To one who is in the habit of attentively observing the amusements and voluntary occupations of children, it will be

evident, that very few among them have the patience or the pride to disentangle those right ancient and respectable mysteries, denominated riddles. This imbecile propensity is generally aggravated by the imprudence of the proposer, who prematurely cuts the knot before any thing like a fair trial has been made of the hearer's ingenuity. The same or a worse fault is conspicuous in those little books of riddles, which preposterously announce the enigma on one side of the leaf, and its explication on the other ; the consequence of which is, that the *explication* is generally the first thing examined, and then the riddle is profoundly studied, in order to ascertain how well it conforms to the answer ! Now let it not be ascribed to the uneasy apprehensions of visionary speculators, if we remonstrate against the foregoing process, as detrimental to the interests of the rising generation. It has, we think, a decided tendency to contribute to the abundance, too formidable at best, of superficial readers, superficial thinkers, and we will even go so far as to say, of superficial actors. For of those who derive both profit and delight from literary pursuits, (pray let us, like Cicero, indulge a little *peripateticè*,) there are two classes. The one occupy themselves solely in gathering new facts and ideas ; their minds are like a moving *camera obscura*, ranging through the infinite scenes of literature, and only catching the impressions, which fall, like rays, in right lines, from the tips of authors' pens, to the surfaces of their own minds. It is true, that amongst this class, there are very many students who do not deserve to their broadest extent the epithets of idle, or useless, or superficial. In the course of their studies, they meet with many difficulties, which, requiring time and patience, rather than thought and investigation, they dutifully solve. Nor are the subjects which they prosecute by any means deserving of contempt. They pore over the never-ending rolls of history, with as serious a gaze, as any mathematician contemplates a demonstration. Nay, they even extend their inquiries into the outward provinces of the severer sciences. They are ashamed to be ignorant of astronomy ; but they take their lessons from Ferguson, rather than the *Principia*, and will cheerfully commit to memory the longest explanatory tables, whilst they shudder at encountering the transitory intricacies of a diagram. Happily, there are books enough in the world to supply the insatiable curiosity and unremitting industry of

these universal readers. And if we adopt the theorem of some modern metaphysician as a calculus, who asserts that the human mind, by its utmost exertions, can attend only to *seven* ideas in a second of time, (as any one may perceive by mentally counting from one to eight as rapidly as he is able,) we may safely aver, that the class of readers who have just been described, go out of the world with their full complement of ideas, and can scarcely look back with regret for having wasted in idleness the fraction of a second.

The other class of readers are they, who have as keen an appetite for information as their more voracious brethren. But how exquisite soever is the pleasure of acquisition, that of reflection they experience to be more so. And where the question lies between *gaining ten* new ideas, and *revolving only two* in every possible light, they hesitate not a moment in adopting the latter alternative. Now we assert, that of these two modes of occupying the intellect, the last involves, to an incalculable degree, a greater amount of profit, a higher measure of delight, and a nearer approach to the summit of literary eminence. From which our promised inference is, that all those modes of education, or even those juvenile amusements, which indulge the natural impatience, or exhaust by prevention the laudable curiosity of youth, are prejudicial to the interests of society. They train up a generation of smatterers; they inflame an inextinguishable passion for novelty; they dismiss the mind from its own province, and reduce it to dependence; they replenish life with successive troops of pretty performers, who glide along with the most elegant imbecility, till a stroke of adversity confounds them; in short, they fill our circulating libraries with restless, busy throngs, whilst they rob the profound Euclid of his deserved portion of plodders, and the mysterious Spenser of many willing and delighted devotees.

In spite, however, of the terrours, which surround that gentle knight, yclepit Allegory, we are persuaded, that if fairly encountered in the pages of Spenser, he would be found to be less formidable than timidity and indolence have fancied him. It unluckily happened, and it must not be concealed, that along with his rare powers of Allegory, Spenser was imbued with the strongest tincture of pedantry, which was the result, partly of the taste of his age, and more perhaps of his uncommon and overflowing erudition. This pedantry was the

origin of those uncouth and unintelligible names, which he has bestowed on his virtues and vices, his qualities and concretes, and by which he has needlessly darkened the dimness of his allegory. When one reads the Allegory of Criticism in the 3d number of Johnson's Rambler, or the genealogy of true and false wit in the 35th of the Spectator, his task is by no means difficult, because the titles of personification are on the level of the same language with the story. The reader's effort, at most, is no greater than that of the boy before alluded to, who picks out his riddle by the obvious clue of the answer. In this exercise, there is considerable pleasure; since one enjoys in it, not indeed the intense coruscations of wit, but its longer and milder stream. Had Johnson, however, so far forgot himself and propriety as to give to the subject of his allegory the impenetrable denomination of Krinoia, had he called Taste, Saporetta, Justice, Jurapal, and Wit, Ingeniunculus, and shrouded his other personages behind equally mysterious veils, who could have fathomed his meaning? Apply this remark to our poet. It is not because the 'Faery Queene' is an *allegory*, that its perusal is often tedious and unimproving. Whatever it contains of genuine allegory is almost as plain as a picture. But the real knots which are scattered all over that exquisite texture consist in the mere pedantick appellations which are attached to the several characters, and which are by no means essential to the allegory. Let these appellations be interpreted, and the dragon which guards the fruit is slain. Why this task has never yet been executed amidst the multitude of annotations, explanations, and perpetuo-perpetual commentaries which for the last two centuries have been lavished on the elucidation of Shakspeare and other old English poets, it is very hard for us to conceive. One would suppose that it would long since have been demanded by an impatient and superficial age. At any rate, we will venture to assert, that nothing but this simple service is necessary to render the poem in question one of the most popular in any language. Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress is read and understood by every child in every nursery, although it is as outright and abstract an allegory as ever sprung from the fancy of man. The reason is, that Temperance, and Charity, and Faith, and their plain-coated companions, are known as soon as seen, and the connexion between each of their names and their several adven-

tures and exploits is understood at once. But when young gentlemen, who have passed through the university, and young ladies, who shrink not even at Locke, and are acquainted with all Sir Humphry's discoveries, commit themselves to the perusal of the *Faery Queene*, in vain do they call into exercise all their powers and resources of etymology, to elucidate certain of the characters there celebrated. To one brave knight they perhaps at first ascribe the character of Honour. By the time however that his adventures are concluded, they have found reason twenty times to change his title. Some gentle damozell too may so far at first get into the good graces of the reader, that he whispers within himself, 'This, I suppose, is Chastity.' A few stanzas onward, however, the virtuous Chastity is found in a predicament which not only disappoints the reader's expectations, but also mortifies or even puts in question his sagacity. And thus, before a struggle is made through half of the six books, the whole work is generally dismissed with something like a parting execration against allegory. Ill-fated allegory! why art thou made responsible for the accidental frailties of one of thy most illustrious votaries? Why should the pedantries and misnomers of Spenser fall upon thy head? Arise, some Tibbald, some Warburton, or Johnson, and with the ingenuity which was displayed on the *Vice* of Shakspeare, let the personages of Spenser be redeemed from that odium which they have so woefully incurred, and from that oblivion to which the lapse of time and the change of language are but already hurrying them too fast!

We are after all very willing to confess, that even this clearing up would not leave the *Faery Queene* so complete a piece of plain ground as the 'smooth-shaven green' of most of our modern poems. But we never will confess, till the experiment has been made, that it would not be beaten by as great a number of travellers, who would derive from the very exercise of surmounting its difficulties and eluding its perplexities, a richer aggregate of pleasure.—We are glad that the mention of pleasure leads us away from the tedious track of discussion, and suggests to us the more agreeable task of speaking directly in the praise of Spenser.

In some respects Spenser is superiour to Shakspeare. He wields the rod of enchantment with a more soothing and insinuating effect—and he throws on the colourings of his de-



scription a brighter flood of light, as well as a softer body of shade. It is true he has a smaller number of brilliant passages; but then he redeems this comparative defect by a much less abundance of trash. He wrote at leisure, and deliberately waited for inspiration; Shakspeare scribbled against time—chased the muse—won gloriously indeed—but sometimes abused her! The stanza of Spenser was too precious an encasement for nonsense; whilst the colloquial structure of Shakspeare's *materiel* admitted the baseness along with the richness of sentiment. For though somewhat paradoxical, it is nevertheless a fact, that the difficulties of rhyme (and no versification is so much involved in them as the Spenserian) keep the mind perpetually awake in pursuit of *something good*; and no poet, who has a spark of soul, ever pens a line for the sake of rhyme alone—he gives to each of his bells a tongue. Whereas the facilities of blank verse and prose, though they may not impede invention, yet by contracting the sphere of our minor associations of ideas, often lull us into the adoption of any sentiment that offers itself first.

Another and a higher merit of Spenser is the lofty and sustained tone of morality, which pervades the whole of his excellent poem. Not but there are many passages in the *Faery Queene* of too dangerous a tendency, if taken separate from the general order, and from their more immediate concatenation. But let him who experiences danger from a single line or a single scene, read on to the close of the adventure in which it occurs. The sequel will be sure to contain a sedative to rectify and quell the combustion of the most unhallowed imagination. Vice is never represented there without its merited and inevitable consequences. But what is better still, our poet generally prepares us to encounter his 'slippery places,' by a previous train of pure and delicate sentiment, with which he artfully excites emotions that strengthen, and moulds us into an attitude which fortifies, our fallible virtue. And this is the praise of Spenser, that whilst his subject inevitably leads his readers among scenes which are a fiery furnace to virtue, he is the only man who, like the angel of God, could guard them safely through, whilst the astonished critick exclaims with Nebuchadnezzar, 'Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have *no hurt*.' Such is the *Faery Queene*—a poem, which draws so nice a line of distinction between the wantonness of nature and the mysteries of

wickedness, that in its perusal the cheek of virtue scarcely knows why it blushes, whilst the rapacity of a depraved imagination seeks for its food in vain.

From the general merit and moral character of the poem, we pass to a brief consideration of its lighter graces.

The Faery Queene is a repository of all the minor beauties of poetry.—Unbounded variety in its descriptions—exact fidelity in its copies of nature—inimitable playfulness in its sallies of fancy—irresistible severity in its satire—a ravishing transport in its flights of passion—an unsparing copiousness, fertility, and richness of imagery—in short, there is not a flower of Parnassus, which is not to be gathered there.

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*The Jesuits.*

THE first conquests of Ignatius in Paris, were Lefevre and Francis Xavier, who taught philosophy in the university. He soon afterwards engaged four other disciples, Lainez, Salmeron, Bobadilla and Rodriguez. To bind his disciples to him by irrevocable ties, he led them, on the day of the assumption, to the church of Mont Martre near Paris, where Lefevre, who had lately been made a priest, read the mass and administered the sacrament to them, in the Subterranean chapel.

After the mass, they all seven together, with loud and distinct voices, took an oath, to undertake, in a certain time, a journey to Jerusalem, for the conversion of the infidels of the Levant, to renounce every thing they possessed in the world, except what was necessary for their enterprise; and in case they could not accomplish it, to throw themselves at the feet of the pope, to offer him their services, to place themselves under his orders, wherever it should please him to send them. Afterwards, three other disciples joined themselves to the first, namely, Le Jay, Codar and Brouët. For the performance of their vow, these companions agreed upon a rendezvous at Venice. On their way, though they were not yet priests, they preached publicly. At Venice these new preachers were attacked with vivacity. But Ignatius had the address to lull this storm, and he was there even elevated to the priesthood, with several of his disciples. They resorted to Rome at the close of Lent in 1538. Assembled at the